



CATAWBA COUNTY

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LOCAL POTTERS TURN THEIR SKILLS INTO A WAY TO HELP OTHERS

HICKORY, N.C. — Debbie and Paul Helton both have jobs helping others. Debbie Helton, an employee of Catawba County Social Services, is the administrative assistant for the ACT program (Assisting Children Together), a day treatment program for children with behavioral problems. Her husband, Paul, works for Catawba Valley Behavioral Healthcare transporting clients at Connections Clubhouse, a day program for adults with mental illness.

They also operate a part-time pottery-making business that often benefits others. Their business is called J&M Helton and is named for their two sons, John and Matthew. Paul took his first pottery class in 2004 from Gary Lee of Lincolnton after discovering that Connections had an unused kiln in storage. He, Debbie and a co-worker developed the idea of having the Connections members make pottery and sell it as a fundraiser. The Heltons still volunteer with this annual event.

In 2005, Debbie took a pottery class from Hamilton Williams at Western Piedmont Community College as an elective for the college degree she was pursuing. (She graduated from Mountain State University with a bachelor's degree in organizational leadership last spring.)



The Heltons say Williams played a major role in their development as potters. Paul took three classes from him and Debbie completed two. Paul makes a variety of turned pottery, including vases, mugs, bowls and the occasional face jug. Debbie hand builds her pottery. She specializes in making small items such as jewelry, dishes, trays and mini pumpkins.

In 2006, the Heltons received a Regional Artist Project Grant from the N.C. Arts Council. Their work is currently on sale at the Hickory Museum of Art gift shop. They also have participated in many local festivals, including the Molasses Festival, Church of the Frescoes, Lincoln and Burke Arts Councils, Hickory Metro Christmas Show, Spring Into Art, and Lake Norman Folk Art Festival.

The Heltons use their pottery as a means of expressing their Christian faith. "This is very important to us," Debbie said. Their business cards include the Biblical quote, "We are the clay, and You our Potter, and all of us are the work of Your hand." (Isaiah 64:8b). Debbie also makes mini pumpkins and pumpkin pins that come with a scriptural message.

They often use their talent as potters to support causes they believe in. Their next show will be from 8 a.m. until noon Dec. 3 at St. Luke's United Methodist Church. Proceeds from this event will benefit the indigent funds of Catawba County Public Health and St. Luke's UMC.

Debbie said she was inspired to try making pottery by her late father, Robert Stinson, who was very interested in local history. In the 1970s, he bought a 200-year-old cabin, which he moved to his property and restored. He also collected historical pottery of the Catawba Valley.

Although the Heltons' pottery making has been successful, Debbie said it is still more of a hobby than a business. "Whatever we make in sales goes right back into supplies."

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